13

Outcomes from the Australian Workshop on Plans for Animals in Natural Disasters

GREG TALBOT

Executive Officer Local Laws, Yarra Ranges Council, Vic

ON 4 AND 5 MAY 2011 THE VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES CONVENED THE AUSTRALIAN WORKSHOP ON PLANS FOR ANIMALS IN NATURAL DISASTERS.

The primary objective of the workshop was to review the need for animals to be integrated into emergency management arrangements.

The workshop was attended by representatives from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (State branch representatives) the Animal Welfare Committee, the Australian Veterinary Association, senior emergency management officials from the Commonwealth and State governments and senior local government representatives.

Participants considered a number of case studies from recent disasters including the Queensland floods, the Victorian Bushfires and the earthquake which devastated parts of Christchurch in New Zealand.

Other workshop objectives included:

- A review of the barriers to the integration of animals into emergency planning infrastructure.
- The identification of key gaps in resourcing and responsibility.
- Agreement on immediate actions which may lead to an increased focus on animal welfare arrangements in emergency management arrangements
- Development of a process for future workshops
- Consideration of the establishment of a National Animal Welfare Emergency Management Committee, similar to the New Zealand approach

Barriers to the integration of animals into emergency management

The participants formed smaller workgroups and lead by facilitators from the World Society for the Protection of Animals, each group provided feedback on the following topics:

What are the current issues, be it across jurisdictions or other, that form barriers to effectively integrating animal welfare into emergency responses and planning?

What are potential solutions to these barriers and what does success look like?

What are some short term solutions which will lead to an increased focus on animal welfare in emergency management arrangements?

The following tables detail a summary of the barriers identified by the delegates which the author has taken the liberty to group in to four subheadings being *political & legislative, geographical, cultural* and *resource & systemic:*

Political & Legislative Barriers

- There are no overarching policy statements
- Existing legislation is problematic and has shortcomings
- Limited law making opportunities
- Lack of leadership and champions
- Insufficient political will
- No agreement on training requirements for those who respond to animal welfare needs

Geographical Barriers

- Lack of statewide, inter-state and national networks
- Differences between States
- No 'common language' in the both the sphere of animal welfare and emergency management
- The inherent variability of disasters
- Inconsistent microchipping practices across states

Cultural Barriers

- Some emergency services and agencies, including Non - Government organisations, have vested and conflicting interests
- There is no focus on animals in emergency managements arrangements and a lack of specific plans
- Arrangements for animals in emergencies is considered 'too hard' and therefore not addressed
- Perceptions about the role of animals in communities and societies
- Laws consider animals in terms of property and the principle that people come before property.
- Difference between the values of urban and rural communities
- Limited understanding about peoples behavior with regards to animals in emergencies
- Lack of awareness between stakeholders
- Success can sometimes be focused on the work of individuals

Resource and Systemic Barriers

- A lack of knowledge about emergency management frameworks in the field of animal welfare
- Inadequate resources
- Inefficient planning cycles for stakeholders
- No agreement on training requirements for those who respond to animal welfare needs
- Limited community education

Given the range of barriers (to the successful integration of animal welfare matters into emergency management arrangements) the delegates were invited to nominate the top three barriers on a State by State[1] basis as follows:

Victoria	New South Wales	Queensland
• There is no focus on animals in emergency managements arrangements • Competing political priorities • Lack of agreed command, control and communications structures	• Inadequate resources • People don't take responsibility for animals themselves • Animal identification	• Competing political priorities • There is no focus on animals in emergency managements arrangements and a lack of specific plans • Lack of awareness between stakeholders
Australian Capital Territory	**Northern Territory**	**South Australia**
• There is limited focus on animals in emergency managements arrangements and a lack of specific plans • Lack of statewide, inter-state and national networks	• Limited law making opportunities • A lack of knowledge about emergency management frameworks in the field of animal welfare • There is no focus on animals in emergency managements arrangements and a lack of specific plans • Inefficient planning cycles for stakeholders	• Competing political priorities • Limited community education • Lack of awareness between stakeholders

Whilst the barriers identified by the delegates varied from State to State the following barriers were collectively identified by all delegates as the being of the highest priority (in no particular order):

• Limited understanding about peoples behavior with regards to animals in emergencies

• Competing political priorities

• People don't take responsibility for animals themselves

• There is no focus on animals in emergency management arrangements and a lack of specific plans

• Perceptions about the role of animals in communities and societies

• Some emergency services and agencies, including Non - Government organisations, have vested and conflicting interests

• Inadequate resources

What does success look like?

Having identified and rated a number of barriers to success the delegates were then asked to reconvene in their workgroups to discuss and provide feedback on what successfully integrated emergency management arrangements might look like.

The workgroups reported that success will be achieved when:

• the roles and responsibilities associated with animal welfare are clearly defined in the emergency management arrangements at all three levels of government

• political commitment exists to support and resource those roles and responsibilities

• households and individuals are adequately informed and prepared on how to manage their animals in disasters and emergencies

• all animals are identifiable.

1 It should be noted that Western Australia was unrepresented

- stakeholders are able to readily access information about populations and communities during an emergency so as to ensure an appropriate response
- clear and specific legislation exists for the management of animals in disasters which supports stakeholders in their roles.
- response teams (State) are able to respond across boundaries (if and when requested) to form a national response function.

Milestones

Having considered what success might look like the delegates provided feedback on the milestones which indicate success has been achieved. The milestones identified included the following:

- Animal welfare is accepted as being at the core of emergency management
- An understanding within emergency response services that animal management and welfare will be included and considered in all responses
- Stakeholders are engaged at the right levels
- Animal welfare emergency committees exist at all levels
- The roles and responsibilities all stakeholders are agreed to and documented
- Policies and guidelines exist
- Education and engagement with communities occurs
- Individuals understand and accept their responsibilities in disasters and have the tools to fulfill them
- There is political endorsement and support for the development of relevant policy and legislation.
- International guidelines and standards are incorporated (wherever relevant) into emergency management arrangements
- A common emergency management 'language' is adopted and applied by emergency management and animal response stakeholders
- Stakeholders have agreed communications strategies
- Access to key contacts from all stakeholder groups in all states is readily available.

Commitments

Having considered and provided feedback on a number of propositions, workshop delegates were asked to participate in a final exercise. The final exercise was designed to draw upon the findings from each of the workgroups and to illicit action from delegates on behalf of the organisations they represented.

This proved to be a powerful exercise - especially given the level of influence and decision making that may be exerted by many of the delegates. The table below lists in no particular order, some of the commitments made and actions that are anticipated to arise from the workshop:

- Seek support for, and the creation of, national guidelines on animal management as evacuation and relief centres (all)
- Finalisation of the State Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan (Vic)
- Develop Animal Welfare disaster plans (NT)
- Apply for the allocation of resources to review and continue the State Animal Welfare Emergency Management Committee (Vic)
- Provide briefings to the State controllers on the matter of animal welfare in emergencies (SA)
- Advance the notion of a national 'contact' list (QLD)
- Include animal welfare matters into operational planning (QLD)
- Apply for national funding to include an animal welfare module into the Australian Emergency Management Framework (all)
- Pursue the inclusion of emergency management into municipal Domestic Animal Management Plans (Vic)
- Undertake a process of identifying key stakeholders and an analysis of capacity in the context of current roles and responsibilities (SA, QLD & NSW)
- Explore training options and opportunities specific to emergency and animal management (Vic)
- Provide briefings to the State controllers on the matter of animal welfare in emergencies (SA)
- Develop statewide contact list (NT)

- Prepare and deliver education material (QLD)
- Pursue clarification as to has responsibility for companion animals and wildlife (SA)
- Advance and pursue the notion of a national policy statement (all)
- Develop a communications strategy including a longer term focus on education (SA)
- Develop Memorandums of Understanding with key stakeholders including Non-Government Organisations and service providers (QLD)
- Ensure that emergency management features in the Animal Welfare Committee (national) agenda (all)

Whilst some actions and commitments may yield to competing demand and priorities the Australian Workshop on Plans for Animals in Natural Disasters provided a forum for open discussion and debate amongst animal welfare stakeholders and emergency management experts. A number of propositions were examined with the outcome being a renewed and lively focus on ensuring that animal welfare is a primary consideration in future emergency management arrangements.

◉ **BIOGRAPHY**

Greg Talbot

Executive Officer Local Laws, Yarra Ranges Council, Vic

Email: g.talbot@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

Greg Talbot is the Coordinator – Local Laws Services with the City of Boroondara which is one of Melbourne's larger inner suburban Councils.

Greg was working with the Yarra Ranges Council during the Black Saturday bushfires and has developed skills and expertise specific to animal management in emergencies. He has participated in a number of State and Local Government emergency management planning committees.

Prior to joining Local Government Greg worked in various roles with the Victorian Prison Service and Community Correctional Services.